

LIGHT EMITTING INTERFACE DISPLAYS FOR A GAMING MACHINE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority under 35 U.S.C. §119(e) from co-pending U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/288,603, filed May 4, 2001, naming Winans et al. as inventors, and titled "PLAYER TRACKING PANEL."

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates to interfaces for gaming machines such as video slot machines and video poker machines. More particularly, the present invention relates to light-emitting interface displays using electro-luminescent elements and/or organic light emitting diode elements for providing player tracking interfaces and game playing interfaces.

[0003] There are a wide variety of associated devices that can be connected to a gaming machine such as a slot machine or video poker machine. Some examples of these devices are player tracking units, lights, ticket printers, card readers, speakers, bill validators, ticket readers, coin acceptors, display panels, key pads, coin hoppers and button pads. Many of these devices are built into the gaming machine or components associated with the gaming machine such as a top box which usually sits on top of the gaming machine.

[0004] Typically, utilizing a master gaming controller, the gaming machine controls various combinations of devices that allow a player to play a game on the gaming machine and also encourage game play on the gaming machine. For example, a game played on a gaming machine usually requires a player to input money or indicia of credit into the gaming machine, indicate a wager amount, and initiate a game play. These steps require the gaming machine to control input devices, including bill validators and coin acceptors, to accept money into the gaming machine and recognize user inputs from devices, such as button pads and levers, to determine the wager amount and initiate game play.

[0005] After game play has been initiated, the gaming machine determines a game outcome, presents the game outcome to the player and may dispense an award of some type depending on the outcome of the game. A game outcome presentation may utilize many different visual and audio components such as flashing lights, music, sounds and graphics. The visual and audio components of the game outcome presentation may be used to draw a players attention to various game features and to heighten the players interest in additional game play. Maintaining a game player's interest in game play, such as on a gaming machine or during other gaming activities, is an important consideration for an operator of a gaming establishment.

[0006] One related method of gaining and maintaining a game player's interest in game play may be to provide a gaming machine with a plurality of games. Traditionally, gaming machines have provided only a single game. When the game player has been playing a game on a first gaming machine and desires to play a different type of game, the player must physically leave the first gaming machine and locate a second gaming machine at the gaming location,

such as a casino, that offers the different type of game in which they are interested in playing. When the player is allowed to select games for game play at the same gaming machine, the game player may participate in game play for a longer time. Therefore, it is desired within the gaming industry to provide gaming machines with the capability to offer multiple games that may be selected by the player.

[0007] One difficulty with providing a gaming machine with different games is that different games may require different inputs. For instance, a multi-payline slot game may require different inputs than a single payline slot game. As another example, a video black jack game may require different inputs than a slot game or a video poker game. Therefore, a design for an input interface may be complicated by different inputs required for different games. In view of the above, it would be desirable to provide apparatus and methods for a gaming machine input interface that may be used with many types of games.

[0008] Another related method of gaining and maintaining a game player's interest in game play are player tracking programs which are offered at various casinos. Player tracking programs provide rewards to players that typically correspond to the player's level of patronage (e.g., to the player's playing frequency and/or total amount of game plays at a given casino). Player tracking rewards may be free meals, free lodging and/or free entertainment. These rewards may help to sustain a game player's interest in additional game play during a visit to a gaming establishment and may entice a player to visit a gaming establishment to partake in various gaming activities.

[0009] Player tracking cards and player tracking programs are becoming more and more popular. They have become a de facto marketing method of doing business at casinos. The programs allow a casino to identify and reward customers based upon their previous game play history. In particular, a goal of the casinos is to identify and then to provide a higher level of service to certain groups of players identified as especially valuable to the casinos. An incentive of a casino for providing these services is to generate "brand" loyalty, and thus, repeat business from its valued customers. For instance, players that visit the casino, on average, once a week may be deemed as "special" customers and the casino may desire to cultivate a "special" relationship with these customers. In general, the selection of gaming services offered to players via loyalty programs, such as player tracking programs, is increasing. Also, the gaming services offered to a particular player are becoming more focused based upon the desires of a particular player.

[0010] A disadvantage of current player tracking units is that the player interface is not necessarily suited for providing increasingly complex and diverse gaming services to game players that are customized to an individual player's preferences. Further, it is not easy to modify current player tracking interfaces to enable them to provide new game services. In view of the above, it would be desirable to provide apparatus and methods for a player tracking unit interface that allows it to be configured for a diverse range of gaming services and is upgraded easily.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] This invention addresses the needs indicated above by providing thin light-emitting interface displays that may